
Philosophy

A philosophy is the foundation of any program. *Your* program philosophy is the base upon which all else must rely. The philosophy of your program for high-ability learners must be built on, and aligned with (integrated into), your district's adopted philosophy for the education of all students.

The philosophy provides the rationale (the why) for developing and implementing appropriate programs for high-ability students. To develop the rationale, consider:

- ✓ Who are the high-ability students?
- ✓ What are their unique needs?
- ✓ How are their needs different from other learners?
- ✓ How can we meet these needs?

Remember that the answers to the basic questions will be the foundation for your program. We will now consider each of them briefly.

Who are the high-ability students?

Many theories about "giftedness" or high-ability students have been developed. However, the definition developed as part of the 1978 federal report known as the "Marland Report" is most widely used.

(The gifted and talented are) "...children and, whenever applicable, youth who are identified at the pre-school, elementary, or secondary levelS as possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, specific academic or leadership ability or in the performing and visual arts, and who by reason thereof require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school." (U.S. Congress, Educational Amendments of 1978 [P.L. 95-561, IX(A)])

*We came with
VISION, not with
sight.
—Wendall Berry*

*By failing to
prepare,
you are preparing
to fail.
—Ben Franklin*

A 1993 review of that definition has resulted in an updated definition of who gifted children are.

“Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools.

Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.”

NATIONAL EXCELLENCE: THE CASE FOR DEVELOPING AMERICA’S TALENT, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Research and improvement, October 1993.

What are their unique needs?

How are their needs different from other students?

For purposes of the education of high-ability students, they are those students in a given school or school district who are exceptional by virtue of markedly greater-than-average potential or ability in some area of human activity generally considered to be the province of the educational system and whose exceptionality engenders special educational needs that are not being met adequately by the regular core curriculum. (Borland, 1989, p. 52)

This definition is based on the student’s need for educational programming to enable each student to reach his/her full potential. In general, gifted students need curriculum and services that vary the depth, breadth, complexity and pace of instruction due to their ability to learn at faster rates, deal with high levels of abstraction, and make associations other children would not be able to make. Educational needs are not always academic. These students also have social and emotional needs that should be addressed at all levels. In addition, at the secondary level these students have special needs for a variety of experiences in cultural and career education, as well as special counseling services. (Feldhusen, 1990; p. 19)

How can we meet these needs?

Your program can meet the needs of high-ability learners by assuring that the programs you develop are:

- grounded on a firm philosophical base that is agreed upon and supported by the community
- rooted in the principles of sound educational practice
- aligned with and integrated into the educational program for all students in the community
- qualitatively differentiated from the regular program (varied in depth, breadth, complexity and pace)

The following are four sample philosophy statements. It is vitally important that your committee develop its own statement of philosophy and definitions which reflect local needs and values. The local development of these components build crucial local ownership. Without ownership, the program's success could be endangered.

These are the foundations to which you will return for evaluation and renewal.

Fundamental to the basic ideals of a democratic society is the belief in the intrinsic worth of each individual citizen. To ensure the maintenance and improvement of the quality of life in such a society, it is essential to provide educational opportunities for each individual to maximize his/her potential. Thus, society, by providing for the growth of the individual, will in turn reap the benefits. For the minority of children at the upper end of the mental ability continuum, the regular education program is inappropriate. The needs, interests, and readiness of these pupils combine to form a mismatch with programs which are relevant for their more average age-mates. They require special educational considerations to more fully realize their potential.

(adapted from State of California and Nebraska

It is vitally important that your committee develop its own statement of philosophy and definitions which reflect local needs and values.

Programs must be grounded on a firm philosophical base that's agreed upon and supported by the community.

The Aurora Public Schools are dedicated to meeting the needs of every student. In a democratic society, which seeks to offer educational opportunities appropriate to each child's ability, it is necessary to provide for the unique needs of the gifted and talented (high-ability learner).

(The gifted and talented) are those pupils whose abilities, talents, and potential for accomplishment are so outstanding that they require a variety of special provisions in addition to the usual curriculum to meet their educational needs.

The purpose of the AGATE program is to provide the academically gifted/ talented student with extensions for learning which provide a variety of educational experiences beyond those normally provided. Enhancing the self as a learner and as a producer is of primary concern. Activities, opportunities, and programs are thus structured to assist the student in assessing the capabilities upon the unique abilities, talents, interests, and needs which represent him/her as a "self."

(Aurora, Colorado)

Appropriate gifted programs are based on a belief that excellent education for the gifted will result in excellence in our society. This premise is part of a foundation upon which these guidelines are built.

** The belief in equal opportunity of education for all, according to individual ability and need, so that each student may have his/her potential challenged to a high degree.*

** The belief that this equal opportunity is necessary and good for both the individual and society.*

** The belief in the development of differential programs and the flexibility in the implementation thereof to provide for individual differences in regard to intellectual, social, and emotional abilities.*

** The belief that the student should be able to engage in educational experiences that both provide a firm foundation in knowledge accumulated to date and enable that existing knowledge to serve as a basis for creativity, innovation and invention.*

(continued)

These guidelines reflect Pennsylvania's continuing commitment to provide a free, appropriate, public education for the mentally gifted consistent with their individual needs and outstanding abilities.

The XYZ Public School has the responsibility to provide services that meet the needs of all students to develop their potential.

Highly capable students have special needs created by their high degree of sensitivity, wide range of interests, advanced verbal and academic skills, rapid rate of learning, and a greater capability for higher-level thinking. Intellectual, academic, and creative talents can paradoxically be a handicap in an educational situation designed to meet the needs of the majority of students.

XYZ School is committed to providing these students with a learning environment flexible enough to allow a diversity of options in order to maximize their potential.

The Extended Studies program will provide support and resources to teachers, students and parents.

It is vitally important that your committee develop its own statement of philosophy and definitions which reflect local needs and values.

Chapter three provides information about theories and definitions of giftedness are helpful to consider in the development of the philosophy statement.

See Appendix C for a sample school board policy that elaborates upon the philosophy statement.

For further information on program philosophy:

Borland, James H.; Planning and Implementing Programs for the Gifted, Teachers College Press, New York, 1989

*Programs must be
qualitatively
differentiated from
the regular program
(varied in depth,
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and pace).*

Colorado State Advisory Committee for Gifted and Talented Student Education, "Toward Principles Governing Outcomes, Learning Tasks, and Performance Standards for Gifted and Talented Learners," Colorado State Board of Education, June 1992

Davis, Gary A. and Sylvia B. Rimm; Education of the Gifted and Talented, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1989

Dettmer, Peggy; "Purposes and Programs for the Gifted," Kansas State University, 1983

Feldhusen, John F., Steven M. Hoover and Micheal F. Sayler; Identifying and Educating Gifted Students at the Secondary Level, Trillium Press, Monroe, New York, 1990

Maker, C. June; "Intelligence and Creativity in Multiple Intelligences: Identification and Development," Educating Able Learners, Fall 1992

Spady, William G. and Kit J. Marshall; "Beyond Traditional Outcome-Based Education," Educational Leadership, October 1991

VanTassel-Baska, Joyce, "Educational Reform: Issues, Concerns, and Implications for Gifted Education," paper delivered to Iowa Talented and Gifted Conference, October 1992